



Listen to the Children...

If a child trusts you enough to tell you that he/she is being hurt, you are in a position to ensure the child gets the necessary protection. The guidelines below will help you respond to the child in a positive manner.

DO:

- Listen to the child.**
- Keep calm.** It is important to remember that you are not angry with the child, but at what happened. Children can mistakenly interpret anger or disgust as being directed towards them.
- Believe the child.** In most circumstances, children do not lie about abuse.
- Give positive messages,** such as "It is not your fault," or "It took a lot of courage for you to tell me."
- Respect the child's privacy.** Do not discuss the abuse in front of people who do not need to know what happened.

DO NOT:

- Promise** a child that you will not tell. You might say something like, "I am responsible for your safety and care about you. Since you are being hurt, I need to tell someone who can help you."
- Panic or overreact** when the child talks about the experience. Children need help and support to make it through this difficult time.
- Pressure the child** to talk or to avoid talking about the abuse. Allow the child to talk at her or his own pace. Forcing information can be harmful. Silencing the child will not help him/her forget.
- Confront the offender.** This is a job for the authorities.
- Blame the child.** Abuse is never the child's fault.

Source: Sexual Assault Crisis Center. Child Sexual Abuse. [Brochure] Knoxville, TN.